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FM DUBLIN 16:1630Z SEPTEMBER 1981

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 324 OF 16 SEPTEMBER 1981

AND REPEATED FOR INFO TO PRIORITY NIO(BELFAST)

MY TELNO 322: BATON ROUNDS

1. I WAS SUMMONED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS TODAY TO FOLLOW UP PROFESSOR DOOGE'S CONVERSATION WITH YOU AT BROCKET HALL.

2. BURKE, THE COUNSELLOR IN THE ANGLO-IRISH SECTION, SAID THE IRISH GOVERNMENT WERE CONCERNED BY A NUMBER OF ASPECTS OF THE PRESENT USE OF BATON ROUNDS. THE RATIO OF DEATHS TO ROUNDS FIRED SEEMED TO BE MUCH GREATER FOR PLASTIC BULLETS THEN FOR RUBBER BULLETS (1:3000 FOR PLASTIC AS AGAINST 1:18000 FOR RUBBER). THERE WERE A LARGE NUMBER OF SERIOUS INJURIES, MANY OF THEM TO THE HEAD, AND THE USE OF THIS WEAPON WAS SETTING BACK THE POLICY OF RE-ESTABLISHING NORMAL POLICING AND THE PRIMACY OF THE RUC. THE IRISH REALISED THAT THERE WERE OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS ON THE USE OF BATON ROUNDS AND WERE PARTICULARLY CONCERNED AT THEIR USE AT SHORT RANGE AND IN NON-RIOT SITUATIONS. THEY ALSO HAD RECEIVED COMPLAINTS ABOUT INDISCRIMINATE FIRING FROM VEHICLES.

3. BURKE SAID THAT THE IRISH BELIEVED THAT THE USE OF THIS WEAPON AT PRESENT WAS BECOMING COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE AND THAT THEY BELIEVED WE SHOULD ASSERT A TIGHTER CONTROL OVER ITS USE. IF THE SITUATION DID NOT IMPROVE, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR THE IRISH TO REMAIN SILENT.

4. I UNDERTOOK TO REPORT HIS APPROACH BUT POINTED OUT THAT THE BATON ROUND WAS A VERY EFFECTIVE METHOD OF CONTROLLING RIOTERS, MANY OF WHOM WERE ARMED WITH FAR MORE UNPLEASANT WEAPONS. THE REASON THAT THERE HAD BEEN MANY DEATHS RECENTLY WAS THAT AN EXCEPTIONALLY LARGE NUMBER OF ROUNDS HAD BEEN USED IN CONTROLLING RIOTS AFTER THE HUNGER STRIKE DEATHS. THE RESULT HAD BEEN THAT STREET VIOLENCE HAD BEEN KEPT TO A MUCH LOWER LEVEL THAN WE HAD ORIGINALLY FEARED. WITHOUT WISHING TO IMPUGN THE MOTIVES OF THE IRISH GOVERNMENT OR THE SDLP, WE KNEW THAT THE PROVISIONALS WERE ORGANISING A CAMPAIGN AGAINST BATON ROUNDS SIMPLY BECAUSE THEIR USE MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO GET CROWDS ON TO THE STREETS. WE HAD A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF MONITORING DEATH OR SERIOUS INJURY AND COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE IRRESPONSIBLE USE OF BATON ROUNDS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO THE RUC AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD BE INVESTIGATED.

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5. ALTHOUGH THE PROVISIONALS MAY HAVE LAUNCHED THIS CAMPAIGN, THERE IS GENUINE CONCERN AMONG PEOPLE HERE ABOUT THE IRRESPONSIBLE USE OF BATON ROUNDS THIS WAS PARTLY FUELLED BY RECENT NEWSPAPER ARTICLES AND IS LIKELY TO INCREASE AFTER THE FORTHCOMING IRISH TV PROGRAMME (MY TELNO 322). I SHOULD LIKE TO GIVE THE IRISH A CONSIDERED REPLY WITH DETAILS OF THE USAGE OF BATON ROUNDS OVER THE PAST 6 MONTHS, THE TEXT OF THE RULES ON THEIR USE AND DETAILS OF ENQUIRIES UNDERTAKEN IN RESPONSE TO COMPLAINTS. IF DEATHS AND INJURIES CAN BE SHOWN TO BE RELATED TO RIOTS, AND IF THE SCALE OF STREET VIOLENCE IS NOW ON THE DECLINE, IT MAYBE THAT THIS FOCUS OF PROTEST WILL BE OVERTAKEN. BUT WE CAN SPEAK FULLY AND FRANKLY TO THE IRISH GOVERNMENT, AND I BELIEVE WE SHOULD DO SO.

TATHAM

[THIS TELEGRAM WAS NOT ADVANCED]

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